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CIA can live with disclosure of total budget

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Washington—The director of central intelligence told Congress yesterday the administration has no objection to the public's knowing the total cost of gathering information abroad. But anything more than that, said Adm. Stansfield Turner, who heads the Central Intelligence Agency, could be used by other governments to determine how the United States conducts such operations.

It would be "a powerful weapon" in hostile hands, he said.

Admiral Turner, who left the 6th Fleet to take over the CIA, testified before a Senate subcommittee, which will decide how much of the combined intelligence budget to make public. The committee, under the chairmanship of Senator William D. Hathaway (D., Maine), has scheduled two days of hearings before it announces a decision.

It appeared likely that the Senate would go along with President Carter, however. Admiral Turner said the President "has directed that I not object to your releasing to the public the single, overall budget figure of the U.S. intelligence community." Unofficial estimates have put that figure as high as \$4 billion, including the cost of such expensive apparatus as spy satellites and the operation of the National Security Agency.

Three former CIA directors—William L. Colby, Richard M. Helms and George Bush—opposed the disclosure of any intelligence budget figures. Mr. Colby warned that release of an overall figure would lead to persistent demands for greater detail.

"I believe that in a very short time we will be losing much of the value of the sums appropriated for these intelligence activities," he said. Indeed, the current

hearings are the result of congressional pressure which followed disclosure that the CIA had violated domestic law and its mandate abroad.

On an unrelated issue, the intelligence director confirmed a report that he had forced the resignation of two middle-level CIA employees for helping former colleagues obtain explosive devices for sale overseas.

What they had done, he said, was make it easier for former employees to obtain explosive-timing devices to sell to a foreign government—reportedly Libya. The sellers would not have released the equipment, he explained, had they not thought they were serving the agency.

In a report yesterday, the Washington Post identified the instigator of the sale as Edwin P. Wilson, a former CIA employee who operates a consulting firm in Washington. Admiral Turner said the employees who were forced out were "trying to do a favor for an old friend."

But they also showed "a lack of good judgment," he said, even if they were "capable, dedicated, patriotic" individuals. Admiral Turner, who did not identify the employees, said he had reported the episode to the President and to other senior intelligence officials.

Mr. Hathaway's committee appeared to be leaning toward the release of some budget figure. The question was how detailed it would be. Most members of the subcommittee appeared to be inclined to go along with the President's lack of objections to an overall figure disclosure.

Senator Barry M. Goldwater (R., Ariz.) said the release of a total figure did not appear to be dangerous, "although I would oppose it."